Family Relations Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies
ncfr catalyzing research, theory and practice

SANDRA L. HOFFERTH AND FRANCES GOLDSCHEIDER *University of Maryland*

# Does Change in Young Men's Employment Influence Fathering?

*This study examined the association between paternal and maternal employment changes and changes in the frequency of fathers praising, showing affection, disciplining, and reading to children. Data were drawn from the Young Adult supplement to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979). Supporting economic theory, fathers were more involved when they and their partner were employed full time and were less involved when their employment exceeded that of their partner. Although fathers tended to be less involved when they worked less, fathers who held traditional gender role attitudes were more involved than those who held nontraditional gender role attitudes. The results suggest the important part fathers' attitudes and values have in influencing their involvement with children under differing employment conditions.*

Economic downturns are highly relevant to family well-being. After a long period of prosperity in the 1990s, Americans experienced a minor recession from March to November 2001, followed by a steep economic decline beginning in December 2007 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). Historically, recessionary periods result in economic hardships for families who experience reduced work hours, periods of unemployment, and consequent loss of income. Research has indicated that employment loss is especially difficult for men because it alters family roles. During the Great Depression, paternal unemployment disrupted the traditional division of labor. As mothers worked and made more financial decisions, fathers' provider role was diminished (Elder, 1999). Research with Iowa farm families experiencing hard times found that economic difficulties were associated with psychological distress and reduced quality of fathers' parenting (Conger & Elder, 1994). Recent recessions have been accompanied by cuts in work hours as well as layoffs. A loss of even some work hours may be as likely as unemployment to alter within-family relationships, including paternal nurturance and involvement.

The early studies on the relationship between unemployment and fathering behavior used interviews from Oakland, California, families beginning in the 1930s and rural farm families in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Conger & Elder, 1994; Elder, 1999). Effects on children and families today may differ from those found in the past and in rural areas. In 1940, only about 23% of children ages 0 – 17 lived in dual-earner nonfarm families, but by 1980, this had risen to 63% and by 1989, it had risen to 73% (Hernandez, 1993). Just as mothers are involved in the workplace, fathers are increasingly involved in all aspects of their children's care (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Sandberg & Hofferth, 2001; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). Given changes in gender roles, the reaction of fathers today may differ from that found decades ago, yet little new research has

Department of Family Science, School of Public Health, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742 (hofferth@umd.edu).

*Key Words: fatherhood, gender roles, work and family.*

been conducted. In addition, although the proportion of men and women who believe that married women should not work outside the home has dropped to less than 20%, there are still differences between men and women in gender role attitudes regarding childrearing. In 1994, half of men thought that preschool children would suffer if the mother worked, compared with one third of women (Casper & Bianchi, 2002).

Using a 21st century sample of fathers with partners and children, this study examines the association between degree of paternal and maternal employment and paternal involvement with residential children in two-parent families. Father involvement includes praising, being affectionate, spanking, and reading to children. Using data over time, we examine whether changes in paternal and maternal employment are associated with changes in these fathering behaviors. We also examine whether the association of employment with paternal involvement varies by the traditionalism of the father's gender role attitudes.

## Background and Theoretical Approach

We draw upon two theoretical traditions to examine the influence of paternal employment on a father's relationship with his child. The first tradition is derived from an *economic approach* in which women exchange their work at home for economic support from men. Economists argue that this division of labor resulted from differential returns to paid employment for men and women (Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 2002). Because the returns to paid work were greater for men than women, the former specialized in paid work and the latter in work in the home, including care of children. As women's returns to paid work have increased, specialization has declined. A model based solely upon relative returns to work and home production would predict that parental investment of time in their children will depend upon work hours; time devoted to children will rise as own work hours decrease. One's own time devoted to the home, however, is also dependent upon the hours of one's partner; as spousal work hours rise, one's own involvement with children should rise, all else equal.

The second approach is *gender role theory*. Under normal circumstances, the father, as the preferred other caregiver, tends to provide care for children when his partner is working, particularly if their work hours do not overlap (Brayfield, 1995). Theorists understand the gendered division of labor to be firmly entrenched, and research does not show a one-to-one substitution between parents in time devoted to children and to household tasks (Blau et al., 2002; Monna & Gauthier, 2008). For example, Nock and Kingston (1988) found an 18-minute increase in father's time with children for each additional hour worked by the mother after 6 p.m. There was no impact of her employment in other periods on his time with children. This is because it is normative for women (but not men) to specialize in household work in exchange for economic support (Brines, 1994). French time use data showed that in couples in which the father worked and his partner did not, the traditional division of labor, her time comprised 83% of parental time spent with children (Pailhe & Solaz, 2008). When both were employed, the mother's time accounted for 76% of parental time. Other research has shown that the father is more involved in household tasks in dual full-time earner couples than in other family types (Bianchi et al., 2006). Although in this case the mother's employment participation is not traditional, the father is still fulfilling the masculine role through full-time employment. When the father works less than his partner, theory suggests that the father will demonstrate his masculinity by doing less household work than his full-time employed counterpart even though he has more time, that is, the gender display model (Brines). Brines also found that increased dependency on the wife led to husbands doing less rather than more household work. The French time use study found that when she worked and he did not, mothers still did 53% of parenting tasks (Pailhe & Solaz).

Apparently, it is the combination of the mother's and father's paid employment that influences fathering behavior. In the economic exchange model, the mother's employment hours should influence the father's participation independently of his own hours. In the gender display model, it is his hours relative to hers that matter. In dual-career (full-time employed) couples, we would expect maximum paternal participation in the home because the mother's paid work hours are the highest and, because his hours are also high, he does not need to display gender. When the father's work hours exceed those of the mother, we would expect the mother to specialize in home production and the

father to devote less time to children. Among families in which the mother works for pay more than the father, the father would be expected to devote more time to the home using the economic model but would be expected to devote less time to the home using the gender display model. When neither is employed, from the gender display model, we would predict low father involvement with children because own work hours are low, and from the economic model, we would predict low involvement because their wife's work hours are low.

### *Gender Role Attitudes as Moderators*

The economic model provides general guidance for trade-offs between the quantity of household work between parents but not for the quality of parenting. Fathers may be perfect substitutes for mothers in direct caregiving. To the extent that men define themselves by their work and are distressed by its loss, however, such time may not be equal. The father's experience of employment loss is arguably more important than actual employment loss in influencing his psychological response and parenting behavior (Harold-Goldsmith, Radin, & Eccles, 1988) but is not directly measured in most studies. A symbolic interaction perspective posits that how the reaction to economic loss, such as job loss, affects the quality of the father's relationship with his children will depend upon his beliefs about family gender roles (Cherlin, 1996). One set of researchers argues that men who are gender role traditional may have a harder time adjusting (Jones, 1991). In a family in which the father defines his role as breadwinner and his partner's as homemaker, losing work may be more emotionally difficult than in a family in which the couple defines breadwinning and caregiving more flexibly. Nontraditional parents should more easily be able to substitute for one another (Jones). Recent research by Gerson (2009) suggested that families who are flexible in gender and family roles are better able to respond to employment crises than families with rigid roles. Such substitution may be the case for some aspects of domestic tasks, but possibly not for parenting, and may result in men with traditional gender role beliefs being more flexible. Recent research by Wilcox (2004) suggested that men with traditional gender role beliefs may be more involved with their families because they belong to religious organizations that promote and reward men's strong commitment to and involvement in family life.

### *Types of Parenting Tasks*

Of course, not all types of involvement are equally pleasurable and acceptable. Fathers may be more willing to substitute for their partners in certain types of activities than others. Research has divided types of care into play, routine physical care, cognitively stimulating activities such as reading to the child, and monitoring and disciplinary activities such as spanking (Bianchi et al., 2006; Harold-Goldsmith et al., 1988; Hofferth et al., 2007; Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). Others have added a separate category for the emotional component of interacting with children—warmth (Budig & Folbre, 2004; Hofferth & Anderson, 2003; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Furthermore, the more involved a father is in daily care with his child, the more likely he is to be involved in supportive activities such as affection, praise, and reading and in disciplinary activities such as spanking, and both could increase together.

Although many nontraditional families eschew physical punishment, religious conservatism is associated with a belief in physical discipline, and we expect that men with traditional gender role attitudes will be more likely to be involved in disciplinary practices such as spanking. Hence, greater gender role traditionalism could be associated with both more warmth and more spanking. Although Wilcox (2004) did not find an association between gender role attitudes and either spanking or affection in his study, he controlled for religious affiliation, with which they are highly correlated.

### *Joint Determination of Employment and Caregiving Decisions*

An alternative explanation for an association between employment and caregiving is that of selection. Partners' employment decisions are not randomly distributed; men who are committed to their families and children may select nontraditional patterns of employment, such as staying at home when their partner is able to get a good job, and such men are also likely to spend time caring for their children. Although this alternative explanation cannot be completely ruled out, differences in motivation for different employment patterns can be controlled through

using difference or ''fixed effects'' models in which we compare behaviors of individuals across time instead of comparing behaviors across individuals.

### *Hypotheses*

The first hypothesis tests the idea that in their fathering behaviors, men are responsive to their own work hours. Those whose hours decline will increase care for children more than those whose hours increase, all else equal. As the father works less, he will engage in more caregiving, providing him more opportunity to show affection and praise and read to his child as well as to spank his child.

The second hypothesis is that men will be responsive to their partners' employment. Parents are complementary and substitutable when caring for children is involved. Fathers will be responsive to maternal employment by becoming more involved in parenting as their wives increase their paid work hours, holding their own hours constant.

The third hypothesis is that men's involvement is not gender neutral. Fathers will increase involvement with children as mothers work more hours as long as they themselves are working. Our expectation is that fathers in dual-career families will be most involved. Compared with the dual-career family, in families with a traditional division of labor (father is employed full time and the mother less than full time or not employed), the father will be less involved. Again compared with the dual-career family, in families in which the mother works more than the father, the father will be more involved if economic exchange is operating and less involved if gender display is the dominant mechanism. We expect that fathers will do less when neither partner is working than when both are working full time; because of the time availability of his partner, he will have little motivation to do household work and because of gender display, he will be motivated to avoid household work even if he has the time.

Our fourth hypothesis tests whether these results vary by the gender role traditionalism of the father. When gender roles are nontraditional, such as when the mother is employed more hours than the father, his involvement with his children will depend upon how traditional his gender role attitudes are. Under gender display, traditional gender role attitudes should be associated with a father doing less than expected given the fact that the mother is employed and nontraditional gender role attitudes should be associated with men doing more than expected.

## METHOD

### *Data: NLSY Young Adult Sample*

This analysis uses 2000 – 2006 data on the children of female youth interviewed as part of the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). The NLSY obtained information from the children themselves as they entered adolescence (ages 10 – 14). In 1994, the same children age 15 and older were interviewed as respondents, beginning a separate but linked study, the Young Adult Study; the most recent data available to us were collected in 2006. We included children of NLSY mothers born from 1975 to 1987 and who were between 18 and 29 years old in 2006. The few youth who were older than 29 in 2006 were born to very young mothers prior to the beginning of the NLSY study; hence, there was little information about their early years. We also limited the sample to those 18 and older, so they could have completed high school. From the 409 men who had become fathers by 2006 and who were living with a partner and at least one child, we created a dataset with the men's detailed reports of their parenting and their current circumstances at each interview after they became parents. Multiple observations on these men from 2000 to 2006, totaling 920 observations with a maximum of four waves of data, were used. The fixed effects analysis requires variation on the dependent and independent variables; consequently, individuals with only one observation over those four waves were dropped, leaving 604 cases. In addition, about 34 cases were dropped because of missing data on several of the independent variables. The sample size for the spanking analysis was further reduced from the full sample of 604 to 314 cases because fixed effects models cannot be calculated for fathers who never spanked their children in the last week, which was a substantial fraction of cases.

### *Dependent and Independent Variables*

*Young adult fathering behavior.* From 2000 to 2006, the NLSY asked young adult fathers four parenting questions, three of which obtained

numerical counts of behavior: How often in the last week did you spank the youngest child? How often in the last week did you praise the child? How often in the last week did you show the child physical affection? The fourth parenting question asked how frequently the father read to his child in the last year (1 = *never*, 2 = *several times a year*, 3 = *several times a month*, 4 = *once a week*, 5 = *about three times a week*, 6 = *every day*).

*Employment hours.* From employment information, we created a measure of the number of weekly hours the male young adult and his spouse or partner worked for pay in the past week at each wave. A set of categorical variables was also created describing the joint employment of the partners: (a) both work full time (omitted category), (b) the father works more than his partner, (c) the father works less than his partner (this category includes a few cases in which both work part time), and (d) neither the father nor his partner works. In the fixed effects framework, both work hours and the joint employment category into which the family falls can change over time.

*Traditional family attitudes.* A measure of traditional family gender role attitudes was created for each wave as an average across six items: the place of a woman is in the home, a wife with a family has no time for other employment, the employment of wives leads to juvenile delinquency, traditional husband/wife roles are best, men should share housework (reverse coded), and women are happier in traditional roles. Each item ranges from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree* (Cronbach $\alpha = .75$). It should be noted that the primary emphasis of these items is on women's role in the home versus the workplace, with less measurement of men's family roles. This measure is almost identical to the traditional gender role measure in Wilcox (2004) drawn from the National Survey of Families and Households.

### *Control Variables*

Standard demographic variables such as race are omitted from the fixed effects analyses because they do not vary across time. Whether the father's child is a biological child and whether the youngest child is male are included in the regressions; there is some variability over time, as men may report on a different child. Time-varying variables include age, highest grade of school the young father has completed, and the presence of a health problem that would limit his ability to work. Whether he lives in his own household or with his parents varies with time and is controlled, as is whether he is married to his partner. Two measures of relationship quality are included in the NLSY79 and are asked in the same way for both married spouses and cohabiting partners: (a) lack of happiness with the relationship and (b) conflict with the partner. Happiness is based on a single question that asks the young father to rate his happiness with his spouse or partner (1 = *very happy*, 2 = *fairly happy*, 3 = *not too happy*). Conflict with the partner is based on an average of five items asking how often he argues with his spouse or partner about (a) chores and responsibilities, (b) children, (c) money, (d) showing affection to each other, and (e) leisure or free time. All items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*), with higher ratings indicative of greater conflict. The scores on each item were summed and divided by the number of items to create the scale. Cronbach's $\alpha$ was .71, indicating good reliability.

### *Analytic Plan*

This analysis takes advantage of multiple observations on our sample of young men. We used a fixed effects methodology that compares each man's fathering behavior in every wave to his average behavior over the four waves (Allison, 2005). Compared with cross-sectional analysis examining the link between employment hours and fathering behavior across fathers at one point in time, the fixed effects approach provides a stronger test of causality. The rationale is that we are not comparing across individuals but, rather, comparing each individual's behavior to his own average behavior across time. If we can establish that variation in an individual's employment is associated with variation in his fathering behavior, controlling for other changes occurring simultaneously, the evidence for a causal effect of employment on fathering is stronger. Variables that do not change over time are not included in the analysis. In addition, individuals who contribute only one observation cannot be included. Comparison of means of the sample before single observation

cases were dropped suggested that no significant biases were introduced because of this selection.

Three of the dependent variables (warmth, praise, and spanking) were counts of fathering behaviors; not surprisingly, the distributions of these variables were highly skewed. Logging the variables helped but did not normalize the distribution. Instead, in the regressions, we used a Poisson distribution, the appropriate distribution for count variables (Larson, 1982; Statacorp, 2001). We used a linear regression-based fixed effects model in Stata (XTREG) for reading to child and Poisson-based fixed effects model (XTPOIS) for warmth, praise, and spanking.

We regressed fathering behaviors each year (praise, affection, spanking, and reading) on the main independent variables of employment and traditional gender role attitudes, controlling for variables such as age, health limitation, and happiness with spouse/partner, using a fixed effects model with standard errors adjusted for clustering of observations. As noted above, the father's parenting response is likely to be dependent upon the mother's employment level. To test the extent to which this is the case, we consider two specifications, one in which the partners' employment hours are independent and another in which they are interacted. The first specification measures continuous employment hours separately for each partner, and the second uses categorical indicators of the two partners' joint employment, with categories for both employed full time (dual-career family), the father works more than his partner, the father works less than his partner, and neither partner is employed. Finally, in a third specification, we added the interaction between traditional gender role attitudes and parents' employment categories. Sampling weights are not generally used in fixed effects models and were not used here.

## Results

### *Descriptive Results*

The means and standard deviations for the samples used in the study are presented in Table 1. Columns 1 and 2 describe the sample used for three of the fathering behaviors (praise, affection, and reading). Columns 3 and 4 describe the sample used for spanking. The samples are similar; hence, we focus on the first two columns. These young fathers averaged age 25 and had completed almost 12 years of schooling. The children were also young, averaging less than 2 years of age, and 9 of 10 were the biological children of the young adult. Few young men had health problems that limited work. Almost all were independent and residing in their own household, and 60% were married. Family attitudes were relatively nontraditional, averaging 2 of a possible 4 on a scale where 4 means traditional.

These young men worked almost 37 hours, and their partners worked 24 hours per week. In 35% of families, both worked full time. The most common combination of employment statuses (43%) comprised the father working more hours than his partner. In 16% of cases, the father worked less than his partner, and in 6% of cases, neither worked.

Fathers averaged 12 instances of praising the child and 27 instances of affection per week. On average, fathers read to their child between once and twice a week over the previous year. Fathers spanked their children very little. In the sample used for the spanking analysis, which kept only fathers who spanked their children, the average number of instances of spanking was between 1 and 2, whereas it was under 1 in the full sample used for praise, affection, and reading.

### *Do Work Hours Influence Fathering Behavior?*

Table 2 uses the continuous specification of work hours in a fixed effects model. Contrary to our expectation of a general decline in involvement associated with increased employment, we found that as fathers' work hours increased, they spanked their child less and they showed their child less affection, but they also praised their child more. There was no change in time spent reading. As the work hours of the partner increased, the father's involvement increased in the sense that the young father spanked his child more frequently, but there was no association between change in partner's employment hours and change in a father's praise or affection. Thus, only for spanking was there significant evidence of less father involvement with increased father work hours and of greater involvement with increased partner work hours, all else equal. Traditional gender role attitudes, which were controlled, were associated with more praise and affection but not with more spanking or reading.

Table 1. *Means and Standard Deviations of Variables in the Analysis*

| | Praise, Affection, and Reading | | Spanking Only | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variables | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Independent measures | | | | |
| Age of father | 24.78 | 3.07 | 24.65 | 3.12 |
| Completed education of father | 11.84 | 1.66 | 11.95 | 1.53 |
| Married (vs. cohabiting) | 0.63 | 0.48 | 0.65 | 0.48 |
| Father resides in own household | 0.88 | 0.32 | 0.91 | 0.29 |
| Father's health problems that limit work | 0.06 | 0.24 | 0.06 | 0.23 |
| Father's family attitudes | 2.10 | 0.45 | 2.09 | 0.44 |
| Unhappiness with spouse/partner | 2.66 | 0.50 | 2.62 | 0.51 |
| Conflict with spouse/partner | 2.33 | 0.64 | 2.39 | 0.62 |
| Child's age | 1.68 | 1.77 | 1.64 | 1.59 |
| Child is biological child of father | 0.95 | 0.22 | 0.94 | 0.23 |
| Child is male | 0.59 | 0.49 | 0.63 | 0.48 |
| Employment measures | | | | |
| Continuous | | | | |
| Work hours/week of father | 36.81 | 20.25 | 35.69 | 20.99 |
| Work hours/week of partner | 23.97 | 18.55 | 22.90 | 18.78 |
| Categories | | | | |
| Father works full time/partner works full time | 0.35 | 0.48 | 0.35 | 0.48 |
| Father works more than his partner | 0.43 | 0.50 | 0.41 | 0.49 |
| Father works less than his partner | 0.16 | 0.37 | 0.17 | 0.37 |
| Father does not work/partner does not work | 0.06 | 0.24 | 0.08 | 0.27 |
| Interactions | | | | |
| Father's family attitudes × Father works more than his partner | 0.92 | 1.10 | 0.87 | 1.09 |
| Father's family attitudes × Father works less than his partner | 0.33 | 0.77 | 0.33 | 0.76 |
| Father's family attitudes × Neither works | 0.15 | 0.57 | 0.18 | 0.61 |
| Dependent measures | | | | |
| In the past week how often father | | | | |
| Praised child | 12.16 | 19.27 | 13.89 | 20.90 |
| Natural log of praised child | 1.97 | 1.06 | 2.07 | 1.10 |
| Showed child physical affection | 27.29 | 32.19 | 28.74 | 32.94 |
| Natural log of showed child physical affection | 2.79 | 1.03 | 2.85 | 1.02 |
| Spanked child | 0.89 | 2.35 | 1.55 | 2.93 |
| How often read to child in past year | 4.16 | 1.74 | 4.07 | 1.78 |
| *N* | 604 | | 314 | |

### *Parental Work, Traditional Family Attitudes, and Fathering*

The analysis in Table 3 specifies employment as a set of joint partner-employment categories. Father involvement clearly depends upon his employment hours relative to that of his partner. In Model 1, in years in which these young fathers worked more than their partners, they did less fathering compared with years in which they were employed full time and were living with a full-time employed partner (the reference category). Fathers engaged in less praise, affection, and spanking but did not differ in reading to their child. In years in which fathers worked less than their partners, they did not increase their involvement. They reported significantly less praise than fathers in full-time dual-career families; however, there were no differences in affection, spanking, or reading. In years in which neither they nor their partner worked, fathers demonstrated more affection but

Table 2. *Factors Predicting Fathering Using Continuous Employment Hours, Fixed Effects Regressions*

| | Praised Child | Affection to Child | Spanked Child | Read to Child |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1 coefficient | | | | |
| Constant | | | | 6.959** |
| Background measures | | | | |
| Age of father | −0.091*** | −0.085*** | −0.169*** | −0.157*** |
| Completed education of father | −0.033 | −0.020 | 0.360 | 0.230 |
| Married | 0.001 | −0.266*** | 0.152 | 0.119 |
| Father resides in own household | −0.205** | 0.129** | 0.852** | 0.039 |
| Father's health problems that limit work | 0.888*** | 0.142* | −0.961* | 0.107 |
| Traditional family attitudes | 0.376*** | 0.133* | 0.180 | −0.737 |
| Unhappiness with spouse/partner | 0.109* | −0.055 | −0.613** | 0.207 |
| Conflict with spouse/partner | 0.139*** | 0.034 | 0.054 | −0.210 |
| Child's age | 0.005 | −0.108*** | 0.233*** | 0.257*** |
| Child is biological child of father | −0.777*** | 0.204** | 0.513 | −0.716 |
| Child is male | −0.094* | −0.115*** | 0.326 | 0.114 |
| Work history measures | | | | |
| Work hours/week of father | 0.007*** | −0.003*** | −0.008* | −0.010 |
| Work hours/week of partner | 0.001 | 0.000 | 0.015** | 0.004 |
| *N* | 564 | 564 | 296 | 604 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

did not praise, spank, or read either more or less, compared with years in which both they and their partners worked full time. The highest level of father involvement across all measures occurred when both parents worked full time.

Because we suspected that gender role attitudes would play a role in father involvement, in Model 2, we present results from adding the interaction between traditional family attitudes and each of the employment categories. Most interaction terms were positive and significant for all measures except for reading. These relationships are plotted in Figures 1 – 3 for praise, affection, and spanking. In each of the figures, the dashed line represents dual-career families in which both were working full time, the omitted category. A value of ''1'' on traditional gender role attitudes means disagreement with traditional gender role attitudes, which we also call ''nontraditional,'' whereas a ''4'' means agreement with highly ''traditional'' gender role attitudes.

*Praise.* In years in which fathers and mothers both worked full time, fathers reported little variation by gender role attitudes in praise for their children relative to the other groups, and his level of praise in years in which neither parent worked did not differ significantly from that of dual-career couples. For years in which one parent worked considerably more than the other, the more traditional the gender role attitudes, the more frequently fathers praised (Figure 1). This is the case both for fathers who worked more than mothers and fathers who worked less. Hence, for fathers with gender role attitudes close to the average (2), there was little difference in the effects of work combinations, but among the most nontraditional, in years in which both parents worked (or neither worked), fathers praised more than in years in which one parent worked more than the other. In contrast, among the most traditional, it was the years in which one parent worked more than the other compared with years in which both worked full time (or neither worked) in which fathers praised more.

*Affection.* Affection varied less by gender role attitudes of the father than did praise (Figure 2), with a fairly similar pattern. As with praise, in years in which both parents worked full time, gender role attitudes had little effect, and in years in which one parent worked more than the other, fathers expressed somewhat more affection, the more traditional their gender role attitudes. The major difference appears for the years in which neither partner worked, which for praise did not differ from years in which both partners worked.

Table 3. *Factors Predicting Fathering Using Employment Categories and Interactions, Fixed Effects Regressions*

| | Praised Child | | Affection to Child | | Spanked Child | | Read to Child | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 coefficient | Model 2 coefficient | Model 1 coefficient | Model 2 coefficient | Model 1 coefficient | Model 2 coefficient | Model 1 coefficient | Model 2 coefficient |
| Constant | | | | | | | 6.96** | 7.34** |
| Background measures | | | | | | | | |
| Age of father | −0.10*** | −0.11*** | −0.08*** | −0.08*** | −0.17*** | −0.16*** | −0.16*** | −0.16*** |
| Completed education of father | 0.03 | 0.07 | −0.03 | −0.02 | 0.39 | 0.47 | 0.19 | 0.21 |
| Married | −0.05 | −0.02 | −0.21*** | −0.21*** | 0.24 | 0.17 | 0.16 | 0.17 |
| Father resides in own household | −0.16* | −0.20** | 0.13** | 0.15*** | 0.81** | 0.76** | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Father's health problems that limit work | 0.80*** | 0.90*** | 0.09 | 0.18** | −0.99* | −1.29** | 0.29 | 0.32 |
| Traditional family attitudes | 0.32** | 0.00 | 0.16** | −0.04 | 0.32 | −0.22 | −0.68 | −0.96 |
| Unhappiness with spouse/partner | 0.08 | 0.06 | −0.04 | −0.06* | −0.68** | −0.78*** | 0.22 | 0.20 |
| Conflict with spouse/partner | 0.12** | 0.14*** | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.02 | −0.19 | −0.17 |
| Child's age | 0.01 | 0.02 | −0.12*** | −0.12*** | 0.24*** | 0.25*** | 0.25*** | 0.26*** |
| Child is biological child of father | −0.78*** | −0.76*** | 0.19** | 0.16* | 0.65 | 0.60 | −0.72 | −0.71 |
| Child is male | −0.03 | −0.04 | −0.10** | −0.12*** | 0.19 | 0.24 | 0.06 | 0.05 |
| Work history measures | | | | | | | | |
| Father works full time/partner works full time | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Father works more than his partner | −0.19*** | −1.67*** | −0.12*** | −1.05*** | −0.76*** | −3.58** | 0.01 | −1.10 |
| Father works less than his partner | −0.41*** | −1.66*** | 0.04 | −0.75*** | 0.32 | −2.44*** | 0.48 | −0.53 |
| Father does not works/partner does not work | 0.15 | 0.75 | 0.24*** | −2.90*** | −0.57 | −0.41 | −0.18 | −0.33 |
| Interactions | | | | | | | | |
| Father's family attitudes × Father works more than his partner | — | 0.73*** | — | 0.45*** | — | 1.25* | — | 0.53 |
| Father's family attitudes × Father works less than his partner | — | 0.60*** | — | 0.37*** | — | 1.19** | — | 0.49 |
| Father's family attitudes × Neither works | — | −0.24 | — | 1.45*** | — | −0.10 | — | 0.10 |
| *N* | 568 | | 568 | | 296 | | 604 | |

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

FIGURE 1. PREDICTED WEEKLY PRAISE (LOG).

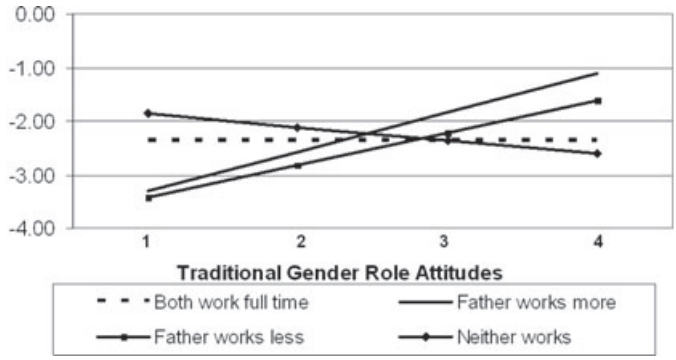



FIGURE 2. PREDICTED WEEKLY AFFECTION (LOG).

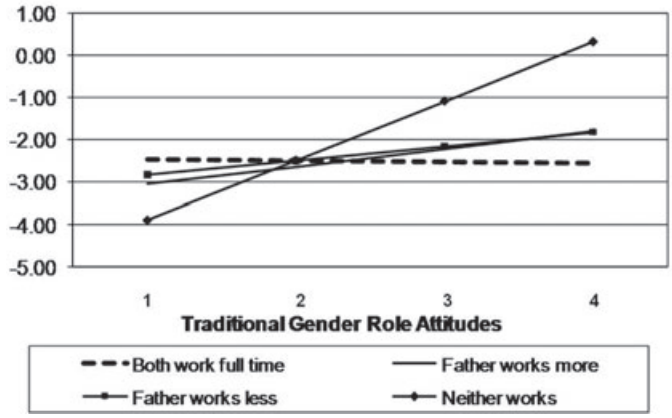
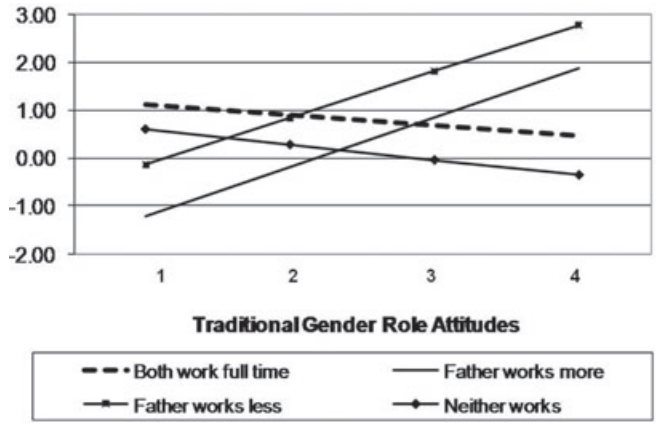



FIGURE 3. PREDICTED WEEKLY SPANKING (LOG).



For affection, in contrast, in years in which neither partner worked, more traditional attitudes were linked with considerably greater levels of affection.

*Spanking.* This analysis could only be conducted for fathers who spanked their children. A substantial proportion of fathers did not spank their child during the survey week, but we do not know whether they ever spanked their child. As with praise and affection, in years in which men were in dual-career families, their gender role traditionalism had no significant effect on the extent to which they were involved in disciplining the child (spanking), and this was also the case for years in which neither worked (Figure 3). In contrast, years in which one parent or the other was the primary earner showed a pattern similar to praise: The more traditional the gender role attitude, the more fathers spanked, and this was the case whether it was the father or mother who worked more.

As expected from the economic exchange hypothesis, in years in which fathers worked fewer hours than partners, the former were more involved in discipline than in years in which fathers worked more hours than their partners. In both employment groups, fathers showed the highest level of spanking when gender role attitudes were traditional and showed the lowest level of spanking when gender role attitudes were nontraditional. This is a pattern similar to that of praise. For praise, in years in which the fathers worked less than their partners, fathers praised more than dual-career fathers when they held traditional gender role attitudes and praised less than dual-career fathers when they held nontraditional gender role attitudes.

In summary, when gender role attitudes were nontraditional, the results supported the theory of gender display, because in years in which nontraditional men worked less than their wives, they demonstrated less affection and less praise than in years in which they and their wives were working full time. They also spanked less. When gender role attitudes were traditional, this research supported economic exchange. Compared with years in which they were in dual-career families, in years when they were working less than their partners, traditional men also praised their child more, spanked more, and were more affectionate. More spanking accompanied by more affection and praise fit the warm, affectionate, but stern ''soft patriarchal'' role that traditional fathers have been encouraged to adapt (Wilcox, 2004). In years in which neither was employed, fathers with traditional gender role attitudes also reported the most affection. This is inconsistent with gender display, which predicts that mothers' lack of employment would lead to less father involvement.

### *Contribution of Control Variables*

Here, we focus only on the results in Model 1 of Table 3, because they differ little from the results for controls in Model 2. As children age, fathers spanked and read to them more but expressed less affection toward them. As they themselves aged, fathers praised, hugged, and read to children less. These are not surprising results; children require fewer direct displays of warmth and affection but require more reinforcement, discipline, and cognitive stimulation as they grow. Older fathers may have commitments to work or to another set of children; thus, age of child and father offset one another. Men living in their own households were more affectionate, spanked more, and praised less, but married fathers were less affectionate than cohabiting fathers. Fathers with health problems were more affectionate and spanked their children less than those without health problems. A low level of happiness with one's spouse/partner was associated with less affection and less spanking, but greater conflict was associated with praising the child more. Fathers were more affectionate with biological children but praised them less. Finally, fathers were less affectionate with boys than girls.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This article examined the influence of paternal and maternal employment on the involvement of young fathers 18 – 29 in the early 2000s. We used two theoretical frameworks, an economic framework that viewed the two parents as substitutes and a gender role framework that hypothesized that reactions to changing employment would depend on perceptions of appropriate gender roles for women.

Both Hypothesis 1, which stated that fathering would be responsive to changes in own employment, and Hypothesis 2, that fathering would be responsive to changes in partner employment, were supported. Contrary to other research about the lack of responsiveness of men to changes in their partners' employment, fathering

behavior appeared to respond to changes in both men's own employment and that of their partner. Fathers were more involved in affection and praise of children as work hours rose but less involved in discipline. Fathers were more involved in discipline as partner's hours rose.

Hypothesis 3 stated that the joint employment of the couple had to be taken into account to understand fathering. The hypothesis was supported. Father involvement was highest in years in which he and his partner were a dual-career couple and lowest when the father worked more than his partner, consistent with economic exchange. Fathers, however, were also less involved when they worked less than their partners. This suggests that gender display is also operative; the joint effect of own and partner employment differed from what would be expected based upon an equal exchange of work inside and outside the home because of the need of fathers to display a masculine role when he worked less. These results held for praise, affection, and spanking but not for reading. The involvement of the father when neither worked supported gender display; it was lower than that of the dual-career father for three outcomes, although only significant in one of these outcomes. Even though he was available, his wife was not employed and, from gender display theory, she should be the presumed caregiver.

Hypothesis 4 was supported. Traditional family attitudes were important as moderators of joint employment and fathering. Overall, men's attitudes were nontraditional, averaging 2 on a scale of 1 – 4, with 1 indicating the least gender role traditional and 4 the most gender role traditional. The more traditional the father's gender role attitudes, the more praise and affection tendered toward his children. The gender role attitudes of the father did not influence involvement when both partners were employed full time outside the home; fathers had high levels of involvement in affection, praise, and spanking in all cases. When gender role attitudes were nontraditional, fathers who worked less than their partners showed lower praise and affection with children and spanked less, as expected from gender display but inconsistent with the economic exchange model. When gender role attitudes were highly traditional, however, these fathers' involvement levels exceeded those of men in dual-career families. Rather than reflecting economic exchange, this behavior may reflect the norms of gender role traditional men, in terms of both warmth and discipline. Instead of reflecting a rigid ideological point of view, holding traditional gender role attitudes appears to reflect commitment to the idea of the family (Wilcox, 2004), offsetting some of the negative effects of lower male employment on fathering behaviors. In contrast to the expectation that nontraditional fathers may be more flexible in adjusting their schedules, more traditional fathers, who may also be more religious, appear to be more flexible (King, 2003; Nock & Kingston, 1988), at least when it comes to the parenting component of domestic roles. Traditional fathers' greater involvement in and commitment to the family may make it easier for them to take over childrearing chores when needed, even under economic pressure. Such men may be members of communities that emphasize the importance of men's involvement in and commitment to their families (Wilcox).

We found evidence that involved fathers participate more in supportive behaviors such as affection and praise as well as in disciplinary behaviors such as spanking. Gender role traditional attitudes were associated with increased affection and praise and, in some circumstances, increased spanking. Conservative family organizations emphasize both the warm and affectionate role as well as the disciplinary role of fathers in rearing children (Wilcox, 2004); this study shows that these appear to go together for gender role traditional fathers. Reading to the child was not influenced by maternal or paternal employment. It may be that reading has such high social desirability that there is little variation to explain. Its range was also greatly truncated relative to that of the other fathering behaviors.

### *Limitations*

The major limitation of the study is that these men were young. Their average age was 25 and, with a child averaging less than 2 years of age, they became fathers around age 23. This is much earlier than the average of around 27 at the onset of fatherhood for men (Child Trends, 2002). Because they are a select group of fathers, the findings may not generalize to older fathers. This cohort of young men, however, is an important one. We know that, compared with earlier cohorts, more have children with multiple women, serve as nonresidential fathers to many of their children, and cohabit rather than marry

(Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010). Other research suggests that early timing of fatherhood is linked to improved relationships with partners and to better relationships with their own mothers (LaTaillade, Hofferth, & Wight, 2010). How this new generation of young men relates to their children as they accommodate new types of relationships with their children's mothers in a difficult labor market is important to understand. The fathering behavior of these young men affects not only their own children but future generation of fathers as well. The conclusions drawn here will eventually be testable on a more representative group of fathers as the NLSY young adult sample ages into their late 20s and early 30s and a higher proportion report having had children.

A related limitation is that the children of these young men were young, about 20 months, on average. This limited our ability to examine reading to children and to examine spanking as a disciplinary parenting tool. Father involvement, however, is highest when children are young (Yeung et al., 2001). Even though the results are likely to differ for fathers of older children, the involvement of fathers when children are young is considered critically important for their development (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010). When fathers engage with their children in positive ways, they contribute to the development of their children and to their own enjoyment and sense of purpose (Lamb & Lewis, 2004).

### *Implications for Practice*

This research examined both small changes in work hours and larger changes that moved men from full-time or part-time work to no work at all. The results show small but significant effects of own and partner work hour changes on changes in fathering behavior over time. The effects of own and partner-employment hour changes, however, were shown to be interdependent. In order to predict the effect of larger shifts in employment, the employment of both partners has to be examined jointly. The family is, after all, an economic unit that works to provide both financial and emotional support.

The presumption of the economic exchange model is that partners are substitutable; when the employment of one declines, that of the other increases. For the most part, we saw that this model works well, on average. It does not hold, however, when fathers hold nontraditional gender role attitudes; when fathers do not hold traditional gender role attitudes, the joint substitution model can very well fall apart, with fathers being less involved with their children than predicted based upon their own and their partners' work commitments. Today's young fathers fall on the nontraditional gender role end of the continuum, which suggests that they may be less able to reach an appropriate compromise regarding work and family when faced with unemployment than were earlier generations of young men with traditional gender role attitudes.

The results provide support for some potential benefits of traditional attitudes in maintaining father involvement during difficult economic circumstances; however, they also suggest potential costs. The potential for fathers who are not employed or are underemployed to be punitive toward children is a consistent lesson that has arisen from historical and recent research on the consequences of unemployment for families (Conger & Elder, 1994). Helping fathers learn how to control their own anger and appropriately rear children could be usefully incorporated into employment and training programs for men. Small qualitative studies (Jones, 1991) have shown that men are ambivalent about their skills in and the value of caring for their children when their wives are working but they are not, and this is important for program designers to consider.

The study suggests the importance of identifying fathers' gender role and familistic attitudes when developing programs for men. Programs that discuss fathers' and mothers' beliefs about gender roles for women and for men might help couples become more flexible and accommodating to changing economic circumstances. Incorporating in jobs programs an attempt to understand parents' beliefs and values, and to help them see how these values influence their decisions could be extraordinarily important for families, not just for fathers.

### *Conclusion*

In the extraordinary circumstance of the Great Depression, many young families were torn apart by the stresses and strains of unemployment because changes in work roles altered parental roles at home and parents reacted poorly to this strain (Jones, 1991). For example, despite

the fact that fathers spent more time at home, children reported that their mother was the primary parent, deciding major issues affecting the family (Elder, 1999). Research suggested that family stress and paternal loss of power following the loss of his work/provider role led to lowered paternal authority and involvement (Elder). Common emotional reactions included paternal depression and spousal conflict. These responses, in turn, spilled over into less positive parental relationships with their children, manifested in reduced affectionate and supportive responses and increased hostility (Jones). We did not find any evidence that there would be such a potentially negative reaction from families today to an economic downturn. For the most part, the results of this study show that fathers increase their parenting involvement when their partner's work schedule changes. Father involvement is particularly high in dual-career families, when both are employed full time. This study has identified one important characteristic of the young father, traditional gender role attitudes, which appears to be a potential strength in maintaining his positive involvement with his children in spite of changes in employment opportunities and unemployment experience.

## Note

We gratefully acknowledge support for this research from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, P01 HD045610-01, through a subcontract with the Cornell University.

## References

Allison, P. D. (2005). *Fixed effects regression methods for longitudinal data using SAS.* Cary, NC: SAS Institute.

Bianchi, S., Robinson, J., & Milkie, M. (2006). *Changing rhythms of American family life.* New York: Russell Sage.

Blau, F., Ferber, M., & Winkler, A. (2002). *The economics of women, men, and work.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Brayfield, A. (1995). Juggling jobs and kids: The impact of work schedules on fathers' caring for children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 57,* 321 – 332.

Brines, J. (1994). Economic dependency, gender, and the division of labor at home. *American Journal of Sociology, 100,* 652 – 688.

Budig, M. J., & Folbre, N. (2004). Activity, proximity or responsibility? Measuring parental childcare time. In N. Folbre & M. Bittman (Eds.), *Family time: The social organization of care* (pp. 51 – 68). London: Routledge.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2009). *Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey* (Unemployment Rate, 1999 – 2009). Retrieved August 10, 2009, from http://Data.bls.gov/PDQ/.

Casper, L. M., & Bianchi, S. M. (2002). *Continuity & change in the American family*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cherlin, A. (1996). *Public and private families: An introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Child Trends. (2002). *Charting parenthood: A statistical portrait of fathers and mothers in America*. Washington, DC: Author.

Conger, R., & Elder, G. H., Jr. (1994). *Families in troubled times: Adapting to changes in rural America.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Elder, G. H., Jr. (1999). *Children of the Great Depression: Social change in life experience.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Gerson, K. (2009). *The unfinished revolution: How a new generation is reshaping family, work, and gender in America.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Harold-Goldsmith, R., Radin, N., & Eccles, J. (1988). Objective and subjective reality: The effects of job loss and financial stress on fathering behaviors. *Family Perspective, 22,* 309 – 325.

Hernandez, D. J. (1993). *America's children: Resources from family, government and the economy.* New York: Russell Sage.

Hofferth, S., Cabrera, N., Carlson, M., Coley, R. L., Day, R., & Schindler, H. (2007). Residential father involvement and social fathering. In S. Hofferth & L. Casper (Eds.), *Handbook of measurement issues in family research* (pp. 335 – 374). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hofferth, S. L., & Anderson, K. (2003). Are all dads equal? Biology vs. marriage as basis for paternal investment. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 65,* 213 – 232.

Hofferth, S. L., & Goldscheider, F. (2010). Family structure and the transition to parenthood. *Demography, 47,* 415 – 437.

Jones, L. (1991). Unemployed fathers and their children: Implications for policy and practice. *Child and Adolescent Social Work, 82,* 101 – 116.

King, V. (2003). The influence of religion on fathers' relationships with their children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 65,* 382 – 395.

Lamb, M. E., & Lewis, C. (2004). The development and significance of father-child relationships in two-parent families. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (4th ed., pp. 272 – 306). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Larson, H. J. (1982). *Introduction to probability theory and statistical inference*. New York: Wiley.

LaTaillade, J. J., Hofferth, S. L., & Wight, V. R. (2010). Consequences of fatherhood for young

men's relationships with partners and parents. *Research in Human Development*, *7*, 103 – 122.

Monna, B., & Gauthier, A. H. (2008). A review of the literature on the social and economic determinants of parental time. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues, 29,* 634 – 653.

National Bureau of Economic Research. (2010). *Information on recessions and recoveries, the NBER business cycle dating committee, and related topics*. Retrieved from http://www.nber.org/cycles/main.html.

Nock, S., & Kingston, P. (1988). Time with children: The impact of couples' work-time commitments. *Social Forces, 67,* 59 – 85.

Pailhe, A., & Solaz, A. (2008). Time with children: Do fathers and mothers replace each other when one parent is unemployed? *European Journal of Population, 243,* 211 – 236.

Pleck, J. H., & Masciadrelli, B. P. (2004). Paternal involvement by U.S. residential fathers: Levels, sources, and consequences. In M. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (4th ed., pp. 222 – 271). New York: Wiley.

Sandberg, J. F., & Hofferth, S. L. (2001). Changes in parental time with children. *Demography, 38,* 423 – 436.

Sayer, L. C., Bianchi, S. M., & Robinson, J. P. (2004). Are parents investing less in children? Trends in mothers' and fathers' time with children. *American Journal of Sociology, 110,* 1 – 43.

Sheridan, S. M., Knoche, L. L., Edwards, C. P., Bovaird, J. A., & Kupzyk, K. A. (2010). Parent engagement and school readiness: Effects of the Getting Ready intervention on preschool children's social-emotional competencies. *Early Education and Development, 21,* 125 – 156.

Statacorp. (2001). *Stata statistical software: Release 7.0*. College Station, TX: Stata Corporation.

Wilcox, W. B. (2004). *Soft patriarchs, new men: How Christianity shapes fathers and husbands*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Yeung, W. J., Sandberg, J., Davis-Kean, P. E., & Hofferth, S. L. (2001). Children's time with fathers in intact families. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63,* 136 – 154.